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ABSTRACT

This study examined discrepancies among mothers', adolescents', and observers' perceptions of family interaction. The study was guided by two approaches to the analysis of interaction: (1) the divergent realities paradigm, which explores divergences in different peoples' perceptions of the same family members' interactions; and (2) the perceived inequality paradigm which focuses on individuals' perceptions of discrepancies between family members in their interaction. A video-recall procedure was used to assess 79 rural, working-class mothers' and their adolescents' perception of their videotaped conversations with each other. Results indicated that adolescents viewed family interactions as more conflictual and perceived greater inequalities between themselves and their mothers in their culturally prescribed, developmentally appropriate push for more autonomy in their relationships with their parents. The nature of the discrepancies between adolescents and their mothers was associated with adolescents' internalizing and externalizing symptoms. The "divergent realities" and "perceived inequalities" may contribute to the transformation which occurs during adolescence in parent-child relationships, in that they become more symmetrical and individuated in nature. (Contains 40 references.) (Author/KB)

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Unique realities: Adolescents' and mothers' views of their interaction

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Abstract

We examined mothers', adolescents', and observers' discrepancies in their perceptions of family interaction guided by two approaches to the analysis of interaction: the divergent realities paradigm, which explores divergences in different peoples' perceptions of the same family member's interaction, and the perceived inequality paradigm, which focuses on individuals' perceptions of discrepancies between family members in their interaction. We used a video-recall procedure to assess 79 rural, working-class mothers' and their adolescents' perceptions of their video-taped conversations with each other. Our results support a developmental lifespan perspective which posits that adolescents and mothers have different developmental tasks which result in their viewing their behaviors with each other through different lenses. Adolescents viewed family interactions as more conflictual and perceived greater inequalities between themselves and their mothers in their culturally prescribed, developmentally appropriate push for more autonomy in their relationships with their parents. Furthermore, the nature of these discrepancies between adolescents and their mothers was associated with adolescents' internalizing and externalizing symptoms. These 'divergent realities' and 'perceived inequalities' may contribute toward the transformation which occurs during adolescence in parent-child relationships, such that they become more symmetrical and individuated in nature.

Divergent Realities and Perceived Inequalities: Adolescents', Mothers', and Observers' Perceptions of Family Interactions and Adolescent Psychological Functioning

The importance of family relationships in understanding adolescent development has been well documented over the past few decades (see Collins, 1995; Holmbeck, 1997; Noller, 1994; Powers, Hauser, & Kilner, 1989, for reviews) . The vast majority of this research has utilized a single person's assessment of family relationships, assuming that the assessment reflected the "truth" about the relationship. Two types of assessors have been used: family members themselves and trained coders. A substantial body of literature exits of studies which have utilized questionnaires to ask a family member, typically the adolescent, but occasionally a parent, about their family relationships. A second large body of literature has accumulated capturing directly observed family interaction which is then operationalized by trained coders using generic coding schemes (see Grotevant & Carlson, 1987 for review of interaction coding schemes). Researchers who engage in observational studies argue that this type of data allows for family interactional patterns to be examined and provides the opportunity for a level of micro-analysis which cannot be addressed with survey-type data. These two modalities of investigation, observational and self-report surveys of family relationships, may, in fact, be studying somewhat different phenomenon since they tend not to be highly correlated with each other (Feldman, Wentzel, & Gehring, 1989; Olson, 1977; Weller & Luchterhand, 1969). Rarely, have the perceptions of trained observers and those of multiple family members been assessed in the same study.

Recently, theoretical positions such as social constructionism, which acknowledge the importance of meaning or interpretation in understanding human behavior, have become more prominent and influential in psychology (e.g., Gergen, 1994a; 1994b; 1991; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990; Hoffman, 1990). Such positions postulate the existence of multiple realities, or the idea that peoples' individual narratives about themselves, their relationships, and their world impact the ways in which they interpret the meanings of their interactions. Thus, two individuals could observe or participate in the same social interaction and have

markedly divergent accounts of the interaction. Such theoretical positions have facilitated new research approaches and methodologies which allow for the investigation of these multiple realities.

One variable which impacts people's narratives about their relationships, and thus, has been hypothesized to impact their interpretations of their interactions in the context of these relationships, is developmental agenda. Western cultures are organized, to a large extent, around developmental levels. Our culture places a great deal of importance upon the roles of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Different goals and agendas are designated for each stage of life. Western developmental theory posits that the psychological "tasks" or agendas of adolescents in our culture differ from those of their parents (Feldman et al., 1989; Montemayor & Flannery, 1991). Specifically, in Western culture, parents' tasks include keeping the family together, keeping the adolescent safe, and providing a secure base from which their adolescents can explore the world. Adolescents, on the other hand, are expected to focus more on separating from their families and beginning to explore the larger world (while still remaining connected to their families). These different developmental agendas may result in adolescents and their parents interpreting their interactions in very different ways. In essence, adolescents and parents may experience divergent realities.

Several theorists have referred to the different developmental agendas of parents and adolescents and the consequent discrepancy in their perceptions of their family relationships as the "generational stake" hypothesis (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Noller, 1994). They suggest that these developmentally different lenses through which family members perceive their interactions result in a tendency for adolescents to maximize differences between family members and to perceive their families more negatively, while parents have a "stake" in minimizing family discrepancies and viewing their families in a more positive light.

Researchers have begun to recognize the importance of examining family members' own subjective understanding of their family relationships. Roberta Paikoff and her colleagues (1991) set the foundation for this important line of investigation with their volume of New Directions in Child Development titled

"Shared views in the family during adolescence" which highlighted the importance of investigating family members' shared and divergent perceptions of their relationships. The empirical projects discussed in this volume employed pen and pencil instruments to understand adolescents' and parents' views of their relationships.

Observational studies have been employed to extend and supplement the knowledge gained from questionnaire instruments. Observational techniques allow for the analysis of the relational, interactional processes which occur between family members as they communicate with each other. Callan and Noller (1986) conducted one of the first observational studies of subjective understanding in families with adolescents. They used a video-recall technique to investigate family members' perceptions of their own and their family members' interactions. In a second study (Noller & Callan, 1988), they also examined trained observers' perspectives in comparison with the family members' perceptions. Their sample included middle to higher income two-parent families with an early adolescent (age 12). The findings from these studies supported the utility of examining family members' perceptions of their family interactions and yielded interesting comparison between family insiders and trained observers.

We have defined two approaches to examining discrepancies in family members' perceptions of their interactions. We refer to the first as the divergent realities paradigm. This approach focuses on discrepancies between different people's perceptions of a particular individual's behavior. For example, do adolescents and their mothers view adolescents' behavior similarly? Or, do trained coders' perceptions of family members' interactions differ from family members' perceptions? The premise behind this approach is that people perceive their world, including their own interactions and those of others, through different lenses, thus they will interpret those interactions in systematically different ways.

Empirical work has shed some light on questions framed from the perspective of the divergent realities paradigm. These questions include whether adolescents and parents perceive their relations with each other differently and, if so, whether these divergences are associated with their psychological health

and functioning. As we mentioned earlier, developmental theorists have hypothesized that parents would tend to perceive their family relations in a more positive light than adolescents (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Lerner & Spanier, 1980; Noller, 1994). Previous research with early adolescents (Callan & Noller, 1986; Carlson, Cooper, & Spradling, 1991; Feldman, Wentzel, & Gehring, 1989; Ohannessian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 1995; Noller & Callan, 1988) suggest that parents do, in fact, perceive their family relations in a more favorable light than do adolescents. Parents of early adolescents report higher levels of family cohesion (Carlson, Cooper, & Spradling, 1991; Feldman, Wentzel, & Gehring, 1989; Ohannessian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 1995) and perceive their family interactions as less anxious, more involved, and stronger than adolescents report (Callan & Noller, 1986). Furthermore, several researchers have concluded that adolescents' perceptions may be more similar than mothers' perceptions to those of outside observers (Callan & Noller, 1986; Feldman, Wentzel, & Gehring, 1989; Jessop, 1981; Noller & Callan, 1988) because their "striving for independence may require adolescents to move outside the family and adopt a more objective, outsider's view" (Callan & Noller, 1986, p.813).

Theoretically, these developmentally different lenses through which family members are hypothesized to look might be expected to facilitate healthy development. Western cultures value autonomy and individual identity and assess healthy adolescents as those who have developed a sense of autonomy and identity separate from their families. Their increasingly negative perspectives of their family interactions and their tendency to maximize differences within their families may facilitate the attainment of these desirable outcomes. Alternatively, although these parent-adolescent discrepancies may be normative, they may reflect an underlying communication problem, and, thus, be associated with maladaptive developmental outcomes. Again, the research addressing this question has been primarily conducted with early adolescent samples, whose perceptions have not been found to be as discrepant from their parents as those of middle to late adolescents (Alessandri & Wozniak, 1989; Feldman & Gehring, 1988; Noller & Callan, 1986). The few studies addressing this question have yielded mixed results in regards to their support for the theory that

parent-adolescent divergences in perceptions about family relations would be associated with adaptive functioning. Carlson, Cooper & Spradling (1991) found that adolescents who held divergent views from their fathers about their family relationships were likely to be more self confident. On the other hand, also in early adolescent samples, parent-adolescent divergence has been associated with greater family conflict (Holmbeck & O'Donnell, 1991), more depressive and anxiety symptoms (Ohannessian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 1995), and with increased dieting behavior in girls (Paikoff, Carlton-Ford, & Brooks-Gunn, 1993). These apparently contradictory findings suggest that divergence in some areas or dimensions might be associated with maladaptive behavior while divergence in other areas may be associated with healthy development (Carlson, Cooper, & Spradling, 1991).

In the current investigation, we examined two indices of psychological functioning: internalizing symptoms and externalizing symptoms. We chose to look at both because of the great importance that both "acting out" and "acting in" symptomatology play in increasing the risk for unhealthy developmental trajectories for adolescents (Kazdin, 1993; Takanishi, 1993).

Based on this divergent realities approach to understanding parent-adolescent interaction, we hypothesized that parents, or mothers in our case, would tend to perceive themselves and their adolescent children as engaging in more connecting behaviors such as support and humor and fewer conflictual interactions, while we expected that adolescents would tend to perceive their own behavior and that of their parents as being more conflictual, less supportive, and less humorous in nature. Thus, we felt that the different developmental lenses through which mothers and adolescents viewed the same interaction in which they both participated would result in their interpreting that interaction in systematically different ways. Furthermore, we attempted to further clarify the ways in which divergence might be associated with either adaptive or maladaptive psychological functioning.

In addition to this 'divergent realities' paradigm, we were also interested in a second approach, which we call the perceived inequality paradigm of interaction. Where the divergent realities approach

examines differences between mothers' and adolescents' perceptions of the same behavior (e.g., the adolescents' level of support), the perceived inequality paradigm examines whether mothers or adolescents perceive discrepancies *between* them in their behaviors. For example, do adolescents perceive that they are less supportive or more conflictual than they see their mothers? Predictions based on the generational stakes hypothesis suggest that parents will be invested in minimizing differences in their families, while adolescents will tend to maximize family differences (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Noller, 1994). Thus, adolescents should perceive many differences between themselves and their parents in their interactions, while parents should perceive more similarities between their own behavior and their adolescent's behavior.

In addition to our hypothesized generational difference in the number of discrepancies identified, we were interested in the content of the discrepancies. Social psychologists have documented the potency of the self-serving bias, specifically, the "better than average" effect, which asserts that people tend to overestimate themselves when compared with others on dimensions that are subjective and socially desirable. Thus, we expected both adolescents and mothers to see themselves as more supportive, more humorous, less conflictual, and less submissive than their family member. Our work with adolescent romantic couples' perceptions of their interaction has strongly supported this bias (Welsh, Vickerman, Kawaguchi, & Rostosky, 1997). Long-standing cultural myths also support this prediction with their contention that adolescents see themselves as always "right" and their parents as "intentionally difficult". Predictions based on the generational stake hypothesis further suggest that discrepancies from adolescents' perspectives in the ways in which adolescents and parents interact should be associated with adaptive functioning.

Although empirical investigations have consistently found discrepancies in perceptions of family relations between parents and adolescents to be greater in middle to late adolescence than early adolescence (Alessandri & Wozniak, 1989; Feldman & Gehring, 1988; Noller & Callan, 1986), the vast majority of research on parent-adolescent discrepancies has focused on early adolescent samples. Ohannessian, Lerner, Lerner, and von Eye (1995), in one of the most recent studies of discrepancies in adolescents' and parents'

perceptions of their family relations, called for future research to focus on other ages of adolescents (besides early adolescents), to examine family communication patterns, and to utilize different indicators of adolescent developmental outcomes (rather than exclusively examining internalizing behaviors). This project extends the literature in all of these areas.

In summary, in this paper, we examine discrepancies in mothers' and adolescents' perceptions about their observed interaction using two approaches, the divergent realities paradigm and the inequalities paradigm. For each approach, we examine: 1) descriptive discrepancies between mothers, adolescents, and trained observers; and 2) the relationship between mother-adolescent discrepancies and internalizing and externalizing behaviors in adolescents.

Method

Participants

Our sample included the working-class, rural families who participated in our Rural Adolescent and Family Study (RAFS)(Powers, Welsh, & Wright, 1994). This sample was obtained from a larger community sample (N= 382) of almost all (95%) of adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 who lived in nine rural towns in Western Massachusetts. Seventy-nine families from this community sample participated in a subsequent phase of our study in which we collected intensive information about adolescents and their families. The present study utilized this family sample. Extensive comparative analyses revealed few significant differences between the participants in our family sample and the larger community sample (see Powers & Welsh, in press).

Forty-eight (61%) of our families had adolescent daughters, while thirty-one (39%) had sons. The adolescents in our family sample ranged from age 14 to 17, with a mean of 15.5 years. Most adolescents lived with both of their parents (63%). Only 19% reported living with a step-parent and 18% reported living with only one parent (in all cases, this was a single mother). Most of the parents in our sample worked outside the home. 89% of the fathers and 83% of the mothers held a part-time or full-time position outside

the home. The ethnic composition of our participants was primarily European-American (86%), with 5% of our participants reporting being Native American, 4% Asian, 3% African American.

Procedure

Families participated in two sessions of data collection for a total of six hours. The first session took place in the families' homes where the father, mother, and target adolescent completed a series of questionnaires and were video-taped having four separate conversations, two between adolescents and their mothers and two between adolescents and their fathers. These discussions were designed to elicit interactions that were pertinent to the developmental task of individuation. The second conversation, which served as the data for the current study, required each adolescent and parent dyad to negotiate areas of conflict. Adolescents and their parents independently filled out an Issues Checklist (Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979), noting issues they had discussed in the past four weeks and rating the intensity of the discussions. Our research assistants selected issues that were noted by both adolescent and parent as being topics over which they had frequent and heated discussions. Each parent-adolescent dyad privately discussed the issue for 20 minutes, using 'back-up' issues if necessary when their conversation did not last the full 20 minutes.

Mothers and adolescents came to our university laboratory within a few days to complete the second data collection session (unfortunately, most fathers were unable to attend the second session due to the long drive and amount of time needed to complete the session). During this session, each mother and adolescent completed our video-recall procedure to assess their subjective understanding of their conversations.

Video-Recall Procedure

Adolescents and mothers individually watched their taped conversations twice. During the first viewing, participants used a 5-point Likert-type scale to rate the extent to which they were supportive, conflictual, humorous, and conceding (giving in) for each of thirty-two 15-second segments (a total of eight minutes of conversation). Subsequently, the mothers and adolescents again viewed the same 8-minute

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portion of their conversation and repeated the procedure, this time rating the extent to which the family member with whom they were interacting was supportive, conflictual, humorous, and conceding. Adolescents' and mothers' ratings for themselves and for each other were separately aggregated and a mean score was calculated for each behavior.

Two trained graduate student coders also rated the videotapes. The coders spent four months (at 10 hours/week), learning the coding system and obtaining adequate level of inter-rater reliability (intra-class correlation coefficients were .78 for conflict, .56 for support, .96 for humor, and .69 for conceding). The coders used the same four codes and the same technical procedure as the family members, except that they watched the tape once before coding it rather than participating in the conversation before coding it.

Youth Self Report Form (YSR; Achenbach, 1991)

The YSR is a 102-item checklist of behavioral symptoms of the adolescent in the past six months. It identifies two broadband syndromes of internalizing and externalizing symptoms. The syndrome of internalizing consists of the anxious/depressed, the withdrawn, and the somatic complaints subscales. The externalizing syndrome consists of the aggressive and delinquent subscales. Achenbach (1991) reported extensive data on the YSR, including test-retest reliability, criterion and discriminant validity, and normative data. Our rural community sample scored higher than the national norms reported by Achenbach (1991) (see Powers & Welsh, in press).

Results

Divergent Realities Paradigm

Eight separate one-way ANOVAs were performed to compare the ratings of the adolescents, mothers, and trained observers: one for each of the four video-recall codes (support, conflict, humor, conceding) for both mothers and adolescents. Figure 1 graphically illustrates the relationship between coders' perceptions on the four dimensions. No differences were revealed in the patterns of results for male and female adolescents for the descriptive analyses examining divergent perceptions, so all families are

reported together. Different patterns were identified, however, for male and female adolescents in the nature of how divergences in perceptions were related to adolescent psychological health. Thus, predictive analyses are reported for the group as a whole, and then separately for adolescent males and females.

When rating the adolescents' behavior in the conversations, significant differences were found between the coders in their ratings of the adolescents' level of support and conflict ($F(2,232)=14.878$, $p<.001$; $F(2,232)=3.394$, $p<.05$, respectively). Multiple comparison analyses indicated that adolescents rated themselves significantly lower in support and higher in conflict than both their mothers and the outside observers rated them. For perceptions of mothers' behavior, significant differences were found between the coders in their ratings of the mothers' support ($F(2,232)=25.434$, $p<.001$). Again, multiple comparison analyses indicated that adolescents' ratings were significantly lower than both the observers' and the mothers' ratings, while no differences were found between mothers and trained coders.

Regression analyses were performed to explore whether the amount of divergence between mothers' and adolescents' perceptions of the *same* behavior was related to adolescent internalizing and externalizing scores on the YSR. Divergence scores were computed for each of the four coded dimensions by subtracting mothers' ratings of the adolescents' behavior from the adolescents' ratings of themselves, yielding the difference in their perceptions of the adolescents' behavior[1]. Since mothers' ratings were subtracted from adolescents' ratings, a negative divergence score indicated that the mother's rating of the adolescent was higher than the adolescent's own self-rating. Alternatively, a positive divergence score indicated that the mother's rating of the adolescent was lower than the adolescent's self-rating. Regression analyses were performed for the entire sample and separately for girls and boys. Both linear and quadratic relationships were tested. Table 1 summarizes significant results separately for each of the four dimensions coded (support, conflict, humor, conceding).

Conceding. For the sample as a whole, a linear relationship between divergent perceptions of the adolescents' conceding behavior and their internalizing symptoms indicated that those adolescents who felt

that they gave in less than their mothers thought they did experienced fewer internalizing symptoms. This finding was retained when girls were analyzed separately, but was not found for boys when they were analyzed separately.

A trend was found for divergence in family members' perceptions of girls' conceding behavior to be linearly associated with their externalizing symptoms. Those girls who felt that they gave in more than their mothers thought they did tended to report fewer externalizing behaviors.

Humor. For boys, a linear finding indicated that the perception that they were funnier than their mothers thought they were was associated with less reported internalizing.

Conflict. Girls who felt that they were less conflictual than their mothers reported that they were tended to report fewer internalizing symptoms.

Support. No significant relationships were identified between divergent perceptions of the adolescents' supportive behavior and their internalizing or externalizing symptoms.

Inequalities Paradigm

Perceptions of inequality between mothers and adolescents in their conversation were tested for each coder (mothers, adolescents, observers) via t-tests (see Figure 2). From the adolescents' perspective, adolescents perceived their mothers to be significantly more supportive (paired t=-4.07, df=78; p<.0001), less conflictual (paired t=3.08, df=78, p=003), and less humorous (paired t=3.94, df=78; p<.0001) than themselves. There was also a trend for adolescents to think they conceded more than their mothers (paired t=1.89, df=78. p=.06). Regarding the mothers' perspectives of the interaction, mothers also thought they were more supportive than their adolescents (paired t=-8.52, df=78, p<.0001), but they did not see any significant differences between themselves and their adolescents in the amount of conflict, humor, or conceding. Observer ratings yielded significant differences between mothers and adolescents in the amount of support expressed (paired t=-3.767, df=76, p<.001) and the amount of humor (paired t=2.859, df=76, p<.01). Mothers were rated as more supportive, while adolescents were rated as more humorous.

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Discrepancy scores were again calculated and regression analyses were performed to examine the relationship between perceptions of inequality and YSR internalizing and externalizing scores. Inequality scores were computed by subtracting the adolescents' ratings for their mothers from their ratings for themselves. Thus, a negative inequality score indicates that adolescents rated their mothers higher on the dimension than they rated themselves and a positive score reflects the adolescent's perception that he or she engaged in more of the behavior than his or her mother. Again, regression analyses were performed for the entire sample and for boys and girls separately (see Table 2).

Conceding. All three analyses regarding the relationship between perceptions of inequality in conceding and internalizing scores were significant. Adolescents' perception that they gave in less than their mothers did was associated with fewer internalizing symptoms for the sample as a whole, as well as for girls analyzed alone and boys analyzed alone.

No relationship was found between perceptions of inequality in conceding and externalizing symptoms for the sample as a whole. For boys and girls analyzed separately, however, the perception that they gave in more than mothers was associated with fewer externalizing symptoms.

Humor. For the entire sample, a quadratic relationship was found between perceptions of inequality in humor during the conversation and internalizing symptoms. The finding held for girls analyzed separately but not for boys. The same pattern was found in the analyses for externalizing behavior. Analyses yielded a quadratic relationship for the entire sample and for girls, but not for boys. For girls, the perception of inequality in humor, regardless of who was seen as more humorous, was associated with both internalizing and externalizing symptoms.

Conflict. For girls, the perception that they were less conflictual than their mothers tended to be associated with fewer internalizing symptoms. Regressions for the whole sample and for boys analyzed separately were not significant. Adolescent perceptions that they were less conflictual than their mothers were associated with fewer externalizing scores when the entire sample was examined, but this finding was

not replicated when the genders were analyzed separately.

Support. No association between perceptions of inequality in the level of support and either internalizing or externalizing symptoms were found for the sample as a whole or for girls analyzed separately. However, those boys who felt that they were more supportive than their mothers in the conversation reported fewer externalizing behaviors.

Discussion

Our findings support the utility of both the divergent realities and the perceived inequality paradigms for examining parent, adolescent, and observer perceptions of interaction. We found that adolescents did perceive their interactions through different lenses than their mothers or than observers. Adolescents also perceived more inequalities in the nature of their interaction than did their mothers. Additionally, discrepancies identified by both paradigms were associated with adolescent psychological functioning.

Divergent Realities Paradigm

Our descriptive analyses guided by the divergent realities paradigm generally supported our predictions based on the generational stake, or developmental agendas hypothesis. That is, consistent with prior empirical work with early adolescents, our sample of middle to late adolescents tended to view their family interactions through more grey-colored lenses compared with their mothers, whose glasses were more rose-colored. Adolescents perceived themselves as less supportive and more conflictual than either their mothers or trained outside observers perceived them. Adolescents also viewed their mothers as less supportive than mothers viewed themselves or than outside observers viewed mothers. This portrait of adolescents perceiving their families through more grey-colored lenses, fits with theories such as the individuation model (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986) which posit that the adolescent task is to develop a separate identity and autonomy from their family, while still remaining connected to their families. As Ohannessian and her colleagues suggested (Ohannessian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 1995), one way

adolescents may begin to achieve this goal of the development of autonomy and identity is via more negative *perceptions* of their families.

Interestingly, our trained observers were much more similar in their perceptions to the mothers than the adolescents in our study. This finding contrasts with previous work which found trained observer's perceptions to be more similar to adolescents' perceptions (Feldman et al., 1989) or to be dissimilar from both adolescents' and parents' perspectives (Noller & Callan, 1988). The previous findings were both with early adolescent samples. Middle to late adolescents have been shown to have more divergent perceptions of their families than early adolescents (Alessandri & Wozniak, 1989; Feldman & Gehring, 1988; Noller & Callan, 1986). It is possible that, with increasing age, adolescent's perceptions become increasingly more negative, while parents' perceptions remain similarly colored. Thus, observers' perceptions, may be more similar to adolescents in early adolescence, but by late adolescence, the perceptions of the adolescents may have shifted to a more extreme position not shared by outside observers. Alternatively, our two trained coders were both mature women, one with children of her own. It is possible that our coders' own developmental agendas resulted in their viewing the interactions through lenses that were more similar to our sample of mothers' lenses. Noller & Callan (1988), did not report data about the one coder of their tapes. Feldman and her colleagues (1989) reported that their coders were both over age 25. They did not report whether either was a parent. This intriguing possible explanation highlights the importance of acknowledging and systematically exploring subjective understanding, and brings issues concerning the perceived 'objectivity' of trained raters and the nature of the training and calibration to the forefront.

Regarding our efforts to predict adolescent well-being from divergence in family members perceptions of the adolescent, the interesting pattern of results has raised several questions. First, the internalizing symptoms (withdrawal, anxiety/depression, and somatic complaints) were more likely to be associated to divergent perceptions of the adolescents' behavior than were externalizing behaviors (aggression, delinquency). Parents are more likely to be aware of externalizing behaviors in their adolescent

children and may modify the lenses through which they view their acting out children such that they, similar to their children, perceive their children's interactions in a more negative light (Noller, Seth-Smith, Bouma, & Schweitzer, 1992). They cannot maintain their rose-colored perspectives of their children when confronted with their children's acting out behavior. Thus, although the parent-child interaction itself may be related to externalizing behavior, the discrepancy between parents' and adolescents' perspectives may not be as salient in predicting externalizing behavior. Internalizing behaviors are less blatant, and mothers may not be aware of how poorly their adolescent children are feeling when they express their psychological struggling through internalizing mechanisms (Powers & Welsh, in press). Thus, the discrepancy between parents' rosy perspectives and adolescents' grey perspectives may be exacerbated in families with internalizing adolescents..

Second, different patterns of association between divergent perceptions and psychological functioning emerged for boys and girls. More significant relationships were reported for girls than for boys. The dimensions of conceding, humor, and conflict were each relevant for girls, while only humor yielded significant findings for boys. For boys, the relationship was simple. If adolescent boys perceived themselves more positively than their mothers perceived them on the socially desirable dimension of humor, they were less likely to report internalizing behaviors. The psychologically "healthier" boys in our sample tended to view their participation in the conversation through more rose-colored glasses, relative to the lenses used by their mothers, while more depressed, anxious, or withdrawn boys viewed their interactions through a greyer lens relative to their mothers. This finding is relevant to the "self serving bias" discussed previously, according to which, individuals tend to perceive themselves more favorably on dimensions that are subjective and socially desirable. While the bias was evident in the perceptions of the non-depressed boys in the domain of humor, it did not appear to operate in the perceptions of our depressed boys.

Particularly relevant for the girls in our sample were issues of power. Girls who felt that they were more conflictual than their mothers thought they were and girls who felt that they gave in more than their

mothers thought they did reported more internalizing symptoms. Those adolescent girls who struggled harder with their mothers and saw themselves as less effective in getting their way in the conversations were more depressed or anxious. In our previous work (Powers & Welsh, in press), we identified a mother-daughter interactional pattern of heightened conflict and submission from the daughter's viewpoint to be associated with prior and future internalizing symptoms. In that chapter, we did not find a relationship between mothers' views of how conflictual or conceding their daughters were and daughters' internalizing symptoms. Our current study clarifies this finding for us by demonstrating directly that the discrepancy between daughters' and mothers' perspectives on how conflictual and conceding daughters were was associated with daughters' internalizing symptoms. Mothers of internalizing daughters miss their daughters' struggles with issues pertaining to interpersonal power. Sociocultural analyses of western cultures describe the socialized development of females' conflict management strategies as including the following components: increased avoidance of overt conflict, denial of girls' and women's own needs, and greater awareness of the needs of others (Block, 1983; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Eron, 1980; Gjerde & Block, 1991; Powers & Welsh, in press). Cultural pressure on young women may facilitate the development of this interpersonal style of heightened conflict and submission, as well as mothers' simultaneous inability to recognize the pattern in their daughters. The co-occurrence of these two forces may contribute to the high rates of depression found in adolescent girls.

It is important to also note the other side of the picture. While adolescent daughters' perceptions that they were more conflictual and more submissive than their mothers perceived them to be were associated with greater internalizing scores, the linear finding also indicates that those girls on the other end of the spectrum experienced the fewest internalizing symptoms. Thus, girls who viewed themselves as less conflictual and more powerful than their mothers viewed them appeared to be the most psychologically healthy. It becomes evident that the examination of discrepancies in *specific* domains and in *specific* directions is necessary to paint a complete picture of the relationship between family members' perceptions

and adolescent well being.

Perceived Inequality Paradigm

Our analyses guided by this paradigm supported predictions based on the generational stakes hypothesis. The developmental agendas, or generational stakes, hypothesis predicted that adolescents would tend to maximize family differences, while mothers would have a vested interest in minimizing differences between family members. Our data supported this prediction. Adolescents perceived significant differences between the ways in which they interacted compared with their mothers in three out of the four categories examined, and their was a trend for them to perceive differences in the fourth category. Adolescents perceived themselves as more conflictual and more humorous than their mothers and there was a trend for adolescents to also view themselves as conceding more to their mothers than they viewed their mothers as conceding to them. Adolescents saw their mothers as more supportive than themselves however, providing support for the thesis that the process of individuation takes place in a perceived atmosphere of basic connection. Mothers agreed with their adolescent children that they were more supportive toward their children than their children were toward them, but they did not perceive any other significant differences between themselves and their adolescents in their interactions. These adolescents, while acknowledging the supportive environment that mothers provided, were perceiving more inequality between themselves and their mothers in their developmentally appropriate push for independence. In contrast, mothers saw relatively fewer differences between themselves and their adolescents, supporting the notion that they were seeking to maintain family unity. Our trained observers represented a mid-point between family members, in terms of the numbers of significant differences they detected. Observers agreed with family members that mothers were more supportive to their adolescents than adolescents were toward their mothers. Additionally, observers agreed with adolescents that adolescents were more humorous than mothers.

The hypothesis that both adolescents and mothers would see themselves in a more positive light than they saw each other (self-serving attribution bias) received limited support. The findings that were

consistent with predictions based on this attribution bias were adolescents' reports that they were more humorous than their mothers and mothers' beliefs that they were more supportive than their adolescents. Rather than presenting themselves in the most positive light, adolescents' rated their mothers as less conflictual and more supportive than themselves. These findings are in direct opposition to the popular notion that adolescents believe that their parents are intentionally difficult and unfair. They are particularly striking since this conversation should pull for parental expression of authority, as the issues discussed were areas of conflict such as cleaning one's room, curfews, and fighting with siblings. Rather, these findings support the idea that both family members, but especially adolescents, perceive mothers to be more pleasant to their adolescents than adolescents are to their mothers.

Again, efforts to predict adolescent psychological adaptation from discrepancy scores yielded interesting patterns of results. In general, perceptions of inequality in the conversation were associated in more ways to adolescent symptomatology than were divergent perceptions of the same behavior. Specifically, the power dimensions of conflict and conceding were once again salient. Both boys and girls who saw themselves as more conflictual than their mothers displayed more externalizing symptoms and girls who saw themselves as more conflictual than their mothers displayed more internalizing symptoms. Thus, seeing the self as highly conflictual, relative to mother, was associated with a variety of psychological difficulties. In addition, adolescents who saw themselves as conceeding more than their mothers showed more internalizing symptoms while those who saw themselves as conceding less than their mothers showed more externalizing symptoms. It appears that, while both internalizing and externalizing adolescents see themselves as more conflictual than their mothers, their perception of the effectiveness of that conflictual behavior in getting their way dictates the nature of the symptoms that they report. Adolescents who are more conflictual and successfully get their way are likely to show acting out behaviors, while adolescents who also see themselves as more conflictual, but view themselves as unsuccessful in getting their way are more likely to show anxiety or depressive symptoms.

The quadratic relationship between perceptions of inequality in humorous behavior and both internalizing and externalizing behavior is also worth noting. For girls, the perception of inequality in the level of humor displayed in the conversation was associated with symptomatic behavior regardless of whether it was the mother or the daughter who was seen as the most humorous. The dimension of humor has been characterized as an aspect of the base of connection from which adolescents can safely separate from the parent. For our girls, disruption in the sense of reciprocity in this connecting dimension was associated with poorer psychological functioning. This finding supports the Individuation Model which posits that adolescent separation and autonomy development takes place most effectively in an atmosphere of connection (Carlson, Cooper, & Spradling, 1991; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986).

A number of limitations are evident in our study and provide directions for future endeavors. Our sample consisted of rural, working class, primarily European-American families. Generalizability of our findings to other groups of adolescents is limited. In addition, due to the logistical constraints, we were unable to include the perceptions of fathers in our analyses. Although previous research suggests a high level of agreement between parents in their perceptions of the family environment (Callan & Noller, 1986; Feldman, Wentzel, & Gehring, 1989; Ohannessian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 1995), examining patterns of perceptions of the *entire* family would be preferable, especially since some recent observational work suggests that fathers' interactions may be even more predictive of adolescents' perceptions of their parental relationships than mothers' interactions (Flannery, Montemayor, & Eberly, 1994). Also, although our correlational analyses identified many interesting relationships between discrepancies in family perceptions and adolescent functioning, no causal relationships can be determined. The direction of effect is unclear; psychological symptomatology may be a result of the bleak perceptions that adolescents hold relative to the perceptions of their mothers or, conversely, the adolescent symptoms may cause more negative perceptions (see Powers & Welsh, in press,\ for support for both of these positions). Finally, our examination of the nature of discrepant perceptions was limited. Future studies, using a larger sample, may be able to

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discriminate levels of discrepancy. It is possible that, while a certain amount of discrepancy in perceptions is healthy and adaptive for adolescents, radical discrepancies may represent a fundamental mis-communication or misunderstanding, undermining the necessary sense of cohesion and reciprocity in the family, and may be associated with adolescent maladaptive functioning. Examining both the amount of discrepancy in perceptions and the content of discrepant views would be useful in clarifying the nature of differences between adolescents and their parents in their views of their interactions and the significance of those differences to adolescents' lives.

In summary, our results support a developmental lifespan perspective which posits that adolescents and mothers have different developmental tasks which result in their viewing their behaviors with each other through different lenses. Cultural norms dictate that mothers are supposed to be more concerned with keeping the family together, thus they appropriately perceive family interactions in a more reciprocal, harmonious manner. Adolescents view family interactions as more conflictual and perceive greater inequalities between themselves and their mothers in their culturally prescribed push for more autonomy in their relationships with their parents. Our results, however, suggest that not all of these adolescent-parent discrepancies are associated with adolescent adaptive development. The content and direction of these perceived discrepancies dictates their relationship to adolescent psychological functioning. These 'divergent realities' and 'perceived inequalities' may contribute toward the transformation which occurs during adolescence in parent-child relationships, such that they become more symmetrical and individuated in nature.

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Notes

1. We chose to calculate divergence scores because they conceptually addressed our questions best. Recent methodological papers have recommended the use of divergence scores, indicating that problems with reliability and spurious correlations once attributed to these scores are not as problematic when examining differences between individuals of the same family (Carlton-Ford, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn (1991). Other researchers have followed this advice and divergence scores are being used again (e.g., Carlson, Cooper, & Spradling, 1991; Ohannessian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 1995).

Table 1

Summary of Significant Regression Analyses Predicting

Internalizing and Externalizing Symptoms from Divergent Perceptions

Coded dimension → Outcome	Linear beta	Quadratic beta	R^2	F
Conceding → Internalizing				
Entire sample	.30*	n.s.	.09	6.74*
Girls	.36*	n.s.	.13	6.33*
Conceding → Externalizing				
Girls	.28^	n.s.	.08	3.50^
Conflict → Internalizing				
Girls	.27^	n.s.	.07	3.45^
Humor → Internalizing				
Boys	-.53**	n.s.	.28	9.24**

Note. Degrees of freedom for the entire sample are 1 and 69 for linear analyses and 2 and 68 for quadratic tests; for girls, degrees of freedom are 1, 43 (linear) and 2, 42 (quadratic); for boys, degrees of freedom are 1, 24 (linear) and 2, 23 (quadratic).

^ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Summary of Significant Regression Analyses Predicting

Internalizing and Externalizing Symptoms from Perceptions of Inequality

Coded dimension → Outcome	Linear beta	Quadratic beta	R^2	F
Conceding → Internalizing				
Entire sample	.31**	n.s.	.10	7.37**
Girls	.31*	n.s.	.09	4.42*
Boys	.38^	n.s.	.15	4.12^
Conceding → Externalizing				
Girls	.32*	n.s.	.10	5.01*
Boys	-.34^	n.s.	.12	3.16^
Conflict → Internalizing				
Girls	.29^	n.s.	.08	3.94^
Conflict → Externalizing				
Entire sample	.33**	n.s.	.11	8.21**
Humor → Internalizing				
Entire sample	-.15	.45*	.11	4.20*
Girls	-.46	.78*	.18	4.60*
Humor → Externalizing				
Entire sample	-.25	.49*	.09	3.50*
Girls	-.27	.62^	.15	3.84*
Support → Externalizing				
Boys	-.39*	n.s.	.15	4.35*

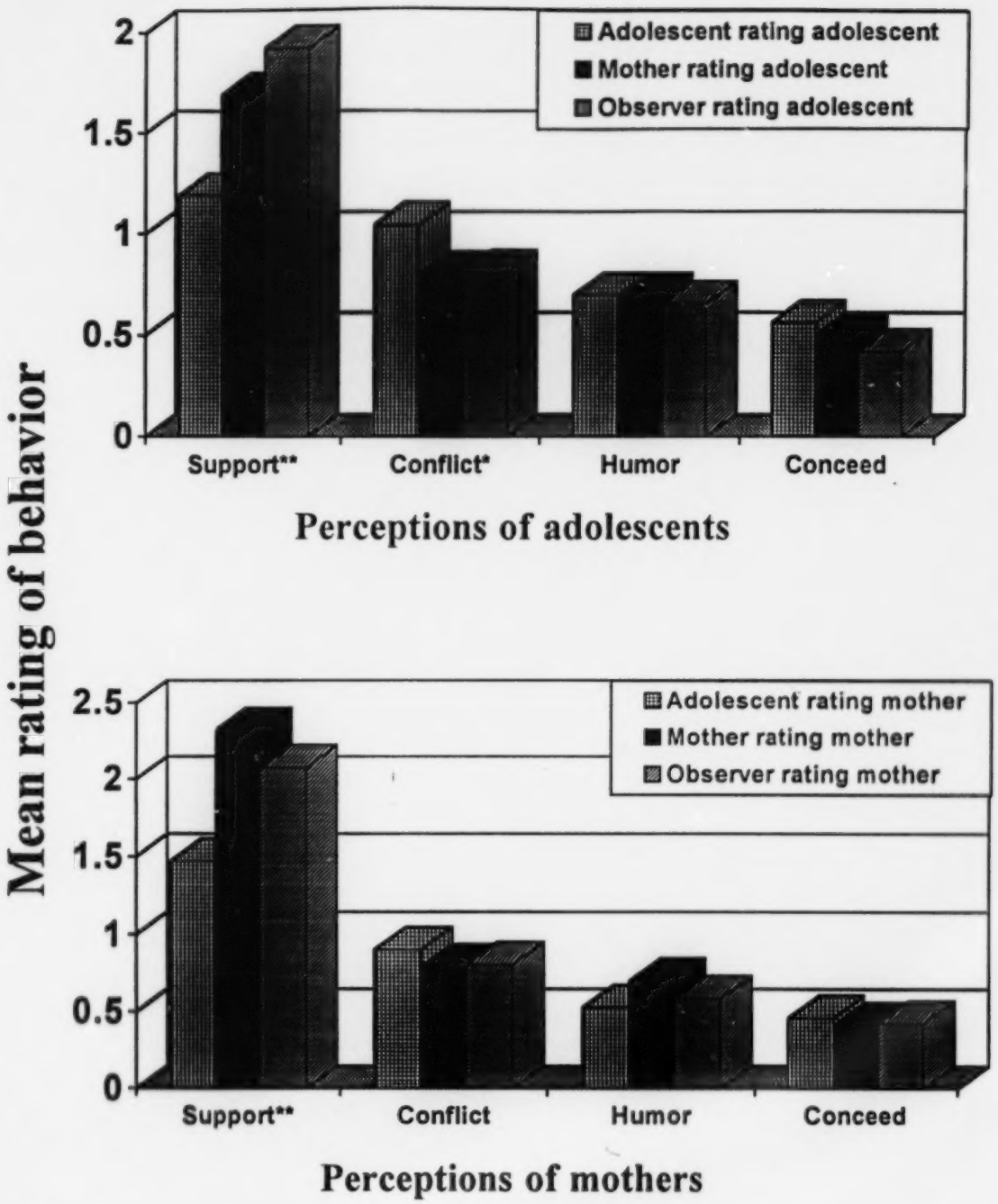
Note. Degrees of freedom for the entire sample are 1 and 69 for linear analyses and 2 and 68 for quadratic tests; for girls, degrees of freedom are 1, 43 (linear) and 2, 42 (quadratic); for boys, degrees of freedom are 1, 24 (linear) and 2, 23 (quadratic).

^ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

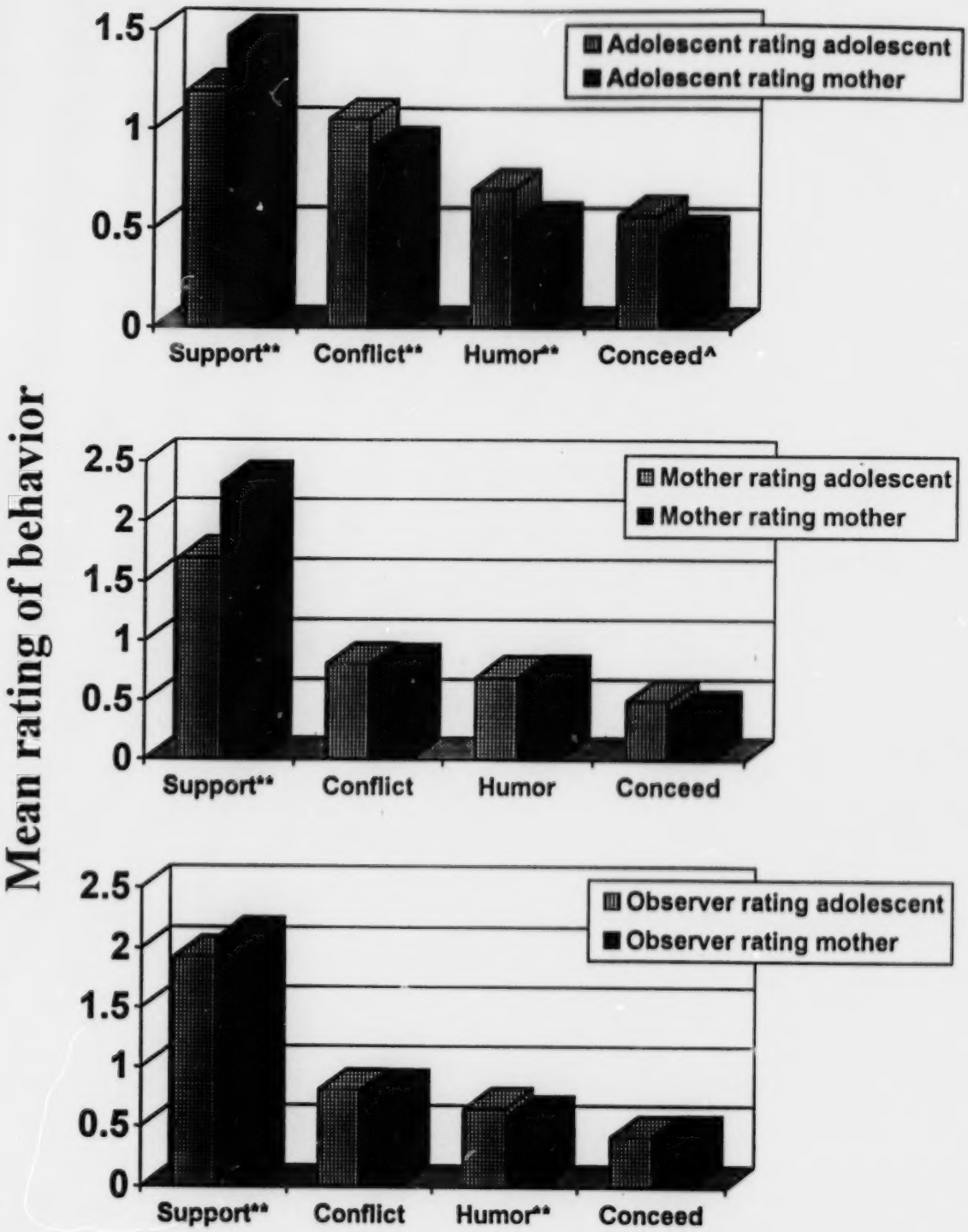
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Divergent realities paradigm: Adolescents', mothers', and observers' perspectives of family interaction.

Figure 2. Perceived inequality paradigm: Adolescents', mothers', and observers' perspectives of family interaction.


Mean rating of behavior
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
Adolescent rating adolescent
Mother rating adolescent
Observer rating adolescent
Support**
Conflict*
Humor
Conceed
Perceptions of adolescents
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
Adolescent rating mother
Mother rating mother
Observer rating mother
Support**
Conflict
Humor
Conceed
Perceptions of mothers

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$



Note. ^$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$